DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 173 715 CG 013 622

AUTHOR Antonucci, Tony
TITLE Attachments Across the Life-Span: A Generational Perspective.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 19p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adults; *Attachment Behavior; Cooperation; *Family Relationship; *Females; Parent Child Relationship; *Personal Adjustment; *Role Perception; Success Factors; Values; Working Women
IDENTIFIERS *Life Span Attachments

ABSTRACT

Attachments are as important to adults as they have been shown to be to infants. Generational family links are an example of attachments that provide consistencies and support change. There is an important interactive network among people of different generations and it is indicated that middle-aged mothers are providing an unpredicted source of support to their families. As times change and women communicate more and more with each other in an attempt to share the burden and rewards of change, it seems critical that the need for the social support provided by significant attachments be emphasized. (PJC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED173715

CG

Attachments Across the Life-Span: A Generational Perspective

Toni Antonucci

Syracuse University*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Toni Antonucci

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

CG013622

Running head: Life-Span Attachments

*Author's present address: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106.

Attachments Across the Life-Span: A Generational Perspective

The purpose of this paper is to suggest the importance of life-span attachments in the work, family roles, and support systems of women and to offer some indirect empirical evidence of these attachments through an examination of values, sex-role identity and social competence within families across generations.

Life-Span Attachments

The concept of attachment is borrowed from the infant literature (Ainsworth, 1972; Bowlby, 1969; Gewirtz, 1972) where it has traditionally referred to that very special relationship an infant has with his or her primary caregiver. Infant attachment was first "discovered" in the middle 1940's and 1950's when Rene Spitz and others (Spitz & Wolfe, 1946; Dennis, Provence & Lipton, 1962) reported that infants were not thriving in hospitals and orphanages. Careful study suggested that this failure to thrive was not the result of poor feeding or poor hygiene but was rather the result of a nonstimulating social environment. People then became more cognizant of the importance of that early first relationship and began to study the attachment an infant exhibits toward his or her mother. Attachment became a primary concern among infant researchers defined as an affectional bond which is specific in focus and enduring in nature, and measured by proximity seeking in times of stress or danger. Interruption of this normal attachment process either through separation or death of

the primary caregiver is now known to be a possible cause of severe retardation of both physical and psychological growth of an infant. Infants were observed to protest and then withdraw from their environment as a result of stressful long-term separations. Some infants withdrew to the point of total marasma which, if not reversed, resulted in death; this, despite the fact that the infants had no physical disability. Dramatic findings such as these sensitized psychologists to the importance of social interaction and relationships for infants.

The role of attachment for normal infant development has been fairly clearly established. Not only is attachment important for infants in abnormal situations but it is also a central aspect of normal growth and development. Ainsworth (1973) suggests that the mother-child relationship provides the infant with a secure base from which to explore. A lack of such a secure base will prevent the normal child from seeking interaction with his or her environment and therefore will prevent the type of behaviors which are likely to lead to optimal development. Lewis (Lewis & Goldberg, 1969) has extended this notion even further and suggests that the type of relationship an infant establishes with his or her mother has implications not only for the present environment-infant interactions but also for future interactions. The infant, according to Lewis, develops a psychological set which transfers to later relationships. Such an interpretation suggests that attachments may also be a critical component of adult development and adjustment.

Much of what is known about attachments in infancy can be directly applied to a concept of adult attachments. When one considers the attach-

ments of adults, many of the infant measures and effects can be applied. People do generally have special relationships they consider important that are specific in nature and enduring in time. And, as in the case of infant attachment, adult attachments can be readily activated by stress and manifested by proximity seeking to the attachment figure. Adults too, are likely to turn to certain people who are important to them during anxious or stressful moments. Although attachment has not been studied by psychologists as an important part of normal adulthood, there is some evidence to suggest that attachments are as important to adults as they have been shown to be to infants.

One perspective, which is increasingly accepted in the psychological literature, is the importance of considering developmental change both in children and adults as part of a life cycle of continuity and growth. Rather than examining infants, children, adolescents, young adults, and old people each in isolation, it is more reasonable to examine one period of a person's life while considering previous experiences that might influence an individual's present behaviors. This same life-span concept can be applied to attachments (Antonucci, 1976). Considering adult attachments within the framework of psycho-social relationships, it becomes much more reasonable to consider an individual's attachments at any one period in time in relation to past and possible future attachments, that is, to consider the consistency or inconsistency within which that attachment exists. At the present time when considering women in their rapidly changing world of increased or at least changed roles, this notion of continuity of life-span attachments seems particularly critical. Women

who are exploring new family and work roles are in need of attachments to provide a secure base, that is, a consistency in their lives from which to explore their world. Of course, this notion applies to both men and women. If an individual is committed to or thrust into the role of assimilating new realms of experience, life-span attachments should allow the exploration process to be more successful. Individuals with secure attachments will have a firmer base from which to proceed than individuals who do not have a consistent supportive base from which to embark.

The concept of life-span attachments has received some attention in the gerontological literature. Since the cultural stereotype suggests that old people are weak, needy and dependent, perhaps it is more acceptable for them to acknowledge this vulnerability. The importance of an older person having a confidant or close interpersonal attachment was demonstrated by Lowenthal and Haven's (1968) classic study which indicated that the existence of a confidant was the only distinguishable difference between older people who did or did not eventually require institutionalization. The critical role of intimacy and interaction in the Lowenthal and Haven study lends credence to the hypothesized importance of life-span attachments. Rather than a sign of weakness, such attachments prove to be a source of strength for old people and, as this paper suggests, perhaps for others as well.

Recently, Kalish and Knudtson (1976) urged that we reformulate the concept of dependency, used predominantly to describe behaviors of the very young and the very old and instead consider that old people may not be exhibiting dependency but rather attempting to maintain life-span

attachments. With children there is a positive set of behaviors described with the word attachment and a negative set of behaviors described with the word dependent. Thus far we have only adopted the negative concept for old people and ignored the positive. Kalish and Knudston (1976) offer the examples of an old woman dependent upon her daughter for a ride to the doctor's and a woman who will not give up a beloved cat to enter a nursing home and suggest that these behaviors should be considered as efforts to maintain longstanding attachments. They propose that we concentrate on life-span attachments and examine the reactions of older people when they find themselves incapable of maintaining the level of attachments they feel is appropriate and desirable. A measure of the divergence between preferred and actual number and quality of attachments might be a reasonably accurate measure of a person's life adjustment. The importance of such a measure frequently emerges in unexpected places and situations. The documented and severe effects of housing relocation of the elderly may be a dramatic illustration of the importance of attachments. Despite the opportunity to move from apparently delapidated housing to newer, more modern facilities, older people have been known to display extremely negative reactions to such new homes, sometimes even death. Although this reaction is generally seen as an indication of the frailty and ill-health of the elderly, their response may be better understood in light of the forced physical and psychological break with longstanding community and neighborhood ties, that is, attachments.

Hartup and Lempers (1973) are among the first to apply the concept of attachments to the family by suggesting that our understanding of the family would be greatly enhanced by an interactional analysis of family

relationships. Building from the mother-infant attachment literature, which now advocates the use of a dyadic bidirectional interactional model, Hartup and Lempers attempted to apply this perspective to adult family interactions. While some were suggesting that the nuclear family was deteriorated, dying, or at the very least, isolated (see Cooper, D. The Death of the Family, New York, 1971), others were heeding Hartup and Lempers and examining the inter-relationships among family members. They report substantial generational consistencies as well as a great deal of intra-familial contact (Bengston, 1975; Hill, 1970; Troll, 1971). For example, Troll (1975) reports that within three-generation families both men and women maintain kinship ties but that women provide social support and services to other family members whereas men are more likely to provide money as a form of aid to relatives. Many researchers (Bengston & Black, 1973; Hill, 1970; Troll, et al., 1969) have begun to report generational findings that suggest certain consistencies in addition to the much touted differences in social interactions, attitudes, values, and life perspectives within the family. Contrary to the thinking of some psychologists and sociologists about the decline of the family in the United States, these studies suggest the active, viable existence of a modified extended family network. Thus, the three-generation family literature provides evidence that people maintain a significant amount of contact within families over time, that is, maintain important life-span attachments.

With the advent of better education, fewer children and increased employment, the life styles of women have been changing. One purpose of this paper is to suggest that despite numerous and significant changes in

the lives of women, the role of longstanding attachments remains crucial. The results of the two three-generational studies which are reported below, serve to reinforce this view. The importance of family ties becomes increasingly evident when one considers the large degree of continuity and consistency across generations within families that exist at the same time and parallel to obvious differences and changes also evident in the family. This intra-family three-generation approach was chosen on the grounds that it would provide a unique and fairly extensive amount of information about family relationships.

Some Empirical Evidence

Focusing on the probability of extreme changes in values and roles that must result from the new work and family life styles individuals are being exposed to, two of my colleagues (Nancy Gillett of Syracuse University and Frances Hoyer of Hutchings Psychiatric Center) and I thought it would be interesting to document these changes within the framework of same sex family linked generational triads. Several generations withing the same family seemed particularly appropriate for study since family members experience similar socialization although members of each generation possess a unique life cycle perspective and age-related role. We thought people would hold values consistent with their roles, developmental stages and functions within the society, that is, that men and women, young, middle-aged and old people would have distinctly different value orientations.

We chose three types of values to examine: terminal, instrumental and work-related. The terminal and instrumental values are delineated by Milton Rokeach (1968). He defines terminal values as important rela-

tively central guiding principles of a significant nature which represent "end-states of existence." We chose the terminal values: A Comfortable Life, Equality, An Exciting Life, Freedom, and A Sense of Accomplishment. Instrumental values are defined (Rokeach, 1968) as more specific, goal-oriented guidelines in one's life. The instrumental values we explored were: Ambition, Capability, Independence, and Intelligence. And finally, we thought the work-related values of Cooperation, Education, Money, Success, and Work might highlight age or sex differences since people of different ages and sexes would be at various points in their respective work careers.

Our subjects were 30 male and 30 female adult children, their same sexed parents and grandparents (N = 180). The adult children were contacted through University classes and asked to fill out a questionnaire and distribute one each to their parent and grandparent. The questionnaire contained a semantic differential scale for each of the above mentioned values. This technique had been previously demonstrated to be a viable technique for use with old people and was chosen over the Rokeach ranking system for that reason (Antonucci, 1975).

Our findings confirmed some of our hypotheses but also offered some surprises. There were generational differences in all of the instrumental values and all but one (Cooperation) of the work-related values. With the exception of A Comfortable Life, there were no differences by generation in terminal values. And finally, the sex differences in values were interesting but only at a borderline level of significance ($p < .058$).

Examination of the generational differences in instrumental values indicate that in every case, older people assigned higher, not lower, ratings to these values than younger people. In the case of work-related values, the same trend was evident. The middle generation, presently in the mainstream of the labor force, did consider work-related values important but in four out of five values, older people rated the values even more highly than their younger counterparts. One explanation for this finding is that the oldest generation has a strong commitment to a value system that by virtue of a lifetime of experience includes work, instrumental and terminal values. This interpretation suggests that older people do not abandon the values that were most relevant to their younger years but rather increase or maintain a commitment to these as well as additional values. It may be that the continued commitment is a result of the belief that such values provided the secure base from which they can now enjoy more retirement-related values both of the instrumental and terminal type. On the other hand, it is possible, and the cross-sectional nature of our data prevents a reasonable choice between the two explanations, that old poeple have now inflated their general value system because of a general feeling of deprivation or withdrawal from the mainstream of society. Our inclination is that the former explanation is more viable than the latter.

The lack of generation differences in terminal values seems particularly noteworthy. These are the values Rokeach says are most basic in our value systems; the ones of fundamental, enduring importance. And it is these values which reveal no differences within families across generations.

Thus, this finding lends some support to the notion of continuity and similarity in the basic socialization experiences within the family structure.[1] The only terminal value rated significantly higher by older people than by people of the younger generations was A Comfortable Life. This value, although designated by Rokeach as a terminal value, does intuitively appear to be especially critical to older people since it is particularly during this age period that maintaining a reasonably comfortable existence may be threatened by financial or health strains. Otherwise, the values Rokeach considered most basic seem to be transmitted accurately and consistently across generations within the family.

As I mentioned above, our analyses of sex differences indicated that value differences between men and women only reached a borderline level of significance. This, itself, seems interesting. College men and women, their parents and grandparents when lumped together and compared on the basis of sex do not show overwhelming differences. There do seem to be more similarities than one might have (certainly more than we) expected in these changing times (see Footnote 1). Once again, there were no sex differences in terminal values and actually very few in instrumental or work-related values. Where there were differences, in the values Ambition, Education, and Intelligence, in each case women rated these values higher. As with the generation differences, at least two explanations are possible. These differences may represent a shift toward achievement-related values

---

[1]It should be noted, however, that although there were no significant differences in these values, correlational analyses also indicate that overall there are very few significant similarities.

for women and shift toward affiliative values for men. On the other hand, women may be rating high values which are not generally attributed to them in the culture but are widely esteemed. This latter explanation might be indicative of a kind of overcompensation in response to society's stereotypic view of women. In this case, the nature of the data precluded a reasonable choice between the explanations. In general, however, the lack of sex differences in values across generations was more impressive than the existence of such differences. (Details of this study have been presented elsewhere, Antonucci, Gillett & Hoyer, 1976.)

Intrigued by these findings, Nancy Gillett, Mary Levitt and I decided to explore the area of sex role identity and social competency. We expected, given the changing times, that older people would be more stereotypic in their sex roles identity than younger people. In a pilot study, 12 three-generation family related female triads were asked to complete the Bem Sex-Role Inventory and the Texas Social Behavior Inventory. The Bem scale is designed to distinguish androgynous individuals from those with more sex-typed self concepts. The Texas Social Behavior Inventory is designed to assess an individual's general feelings of competence in a variety of social situations. It was expected that younger women would have lower femininity and higher masculinity scores than their mother and grandmothers and that this younger group would also have significantly higher social competence scores. These expectations were only partially correct. In fact, there were several interesting unexpected findings.

The middle-aged women had the highest masculinity scores (M = 97.8) followed by young women (M = 88.7), and then the oldest women (M = 76.3).

Each of these differences were significant. On the other hand, the two younger generations scored significantly higher than the oldest generation on the femininity scale but their scores were not significantly different from each other. Finally, there were no significant differences by generation in social competence scores. Exploring further, a high positive significant correlation between masculinity and social competence and a low positive nonsignificant correlation between femininity and social competence was indicated. It is possible that this finding is as much a reflection about the inadequacy of masculinity-femininity scales in general as it is a reflection of the actual relationship between sex role identity and social competence. However, the correlation between femininity scores and social competence scores, although not statistically significant overall, suggest some very interesting differences in patterns of relationships when examined separately by generation. For the youngest generation, there was a positive correlation of $r = .16$ between femininity and social competence. In the middle-aged generation, this correlation was also positive but much higher, $r = .74$. In the oldest generation, the correlation between femininity and social competence was a negative one, $r = -.27$. Thus, contrary to prediction, middle-aged women have both higher masculinity and femininity scores and show a significant relationship between femininity and social competence as well as the more expected relationship between masculinity and social competence scores. This suggests that although there may be changes in sex role identity, it is important to note that middle-aged women have managed to achieve high masculinity, high femininity and high social competence scores, reflecting Neugarten and Datan's (1973) view that middle-aged women reach a point in their lives where they have

coped with a majority of the tasks they face as young women and are prepared to venture into new, perhaps more "masculine" areas. These middle-aged women seem to represent a combination of the old and the new, which results in a stronger, perhaps more androgynous concept of social competence. On the other hand, the older women seem to lose all their sources of identity and self-definition. Contrary to the middle-aged women who are ready to embrace new roles, these older women seem to lose some roles and simply abandon others.

Some Thoughts About Women's Work, Family Roles and Social Support

There seems to be a thread that ties together the attachment theory discussed earlier and these two three-generation studies, that is, that generational family links are an example (one of many) of attachments that provide consistencies and support change.

The three-generation studies highlight two things. First, there is clearly an important, interactive network among people of different generations. This is indicated by the lack of differences in terminal value systems within families. Thus, there is some evidence, albeit indirect, that long-term attachment relationships do exist across generations. The pilot three-generation study of sex role identity and social competence suggests a second useful point. Although we are in the midst of constant, sometimes extreme change, it is often difficult to predict where that change will surface. Whereas it was hypothesized that changes in a positive direction in the areas of sex role identity and social competence would come from young women, the data indicate that their middle-aged mothers were both more masculine and more feminine. These women seem

to be providing an unpredicted source of support to their families.

In conclusion, it is proposed that people, adults and infants, men and women, require long-term, high quality relationships with others, that is, attachments. These relationships seem to be of major importance to adult development and should receive more attention. Attachments represent vital, interactive communication systems that allow people the strength to explore new alternatives. Traditional male-female, parent-child relationships could thus be providing support for change, a foundation from which one can grow and expand. These relationships need not be traditional; they may be heterosexual or homosexual friendships. It is not the status or types of people involved that are important, but rather the very nature of the relationship--relationships based on equality and mutual support.

As times change and women communicate more and more with each other in an attempt to share the burden and rewards of change, it seems critical that the need for the social support provided by significant attachments be emphasized. The important role these attachments play in our lives, should be acknowledged, so that it will be possible to teach each other how to develop and nurture productive, healthy attachments. An important contribution of the Women's Movement and research on women can be to explicate and encourage the development of positive attachments and help people, both men and women, to avoid the unhealthy attachments exemplified by battered wives and abusing parents. Social support systems or healthy attachments are critical to the adjustments that must be made in the areas of work and family in these sometimes frustrating, sometimes exhilarating, but certainly changing times.

References

Ainsworth, M. Attachment and dependency: A comparison. In J. S. Gewirtz (Ed.), Attachment and dependency. Washington: Winston, 1972, 97-138.

Ainsworth, M. The development of infant-mother attachment. In B. M. Caldwell and H. N. Ricciuti (Eds.), Review of Child Development Research III. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Ainsworth, M. Infant-mother attachment and social development: socialization as a product of reciprocal responsiveness to signals. In M. Richards (Ed.), The intregration of the child into the social world. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

Antonucci, T. On the relationship between values and adjustment in old men. International Journal of Aging and Human Development. Winter, 1975, Vol. 5, No. 1., 57-69.

Antonucci, T. Attachment: A life-span concept. Human Development, 1976, 19(3), 135-142.

Antonucci, T., Gillett, N., Hoyer, F. W. Values and self-esteem in three generations of men and women. Presented at the annual meetings of the Gerontological Society, New York, October, 1976.

Bengston, V. Generation and family effects in value socialization. American Sociological Review, Vol. 40, No. 3, June, 1975, 358-371.

Bengston, V. & Black, K. Intergenerational relations and continuities in socialization. In P. B. Baltes and K. W. Schaie (Eds.), Life-span developmental psychology: Personality and socialization. New York: Academic Press, 1973.

Bowlby, J. Attachment and loss, Vol. 1 Attachment. London: Hogarth; New York: Basic Books, 1969.

Cooper, D. (Ed.). The death of the family. New York, 1971.

Gewirtz, J. L. (Ed.). Attachment and dependency. Washington, D. C.: V. H. Winston and Sons, 1972.

Gillett, N., Antonucci, T. & Levitt, M. Masculinity, femininity and social competence in three generations of women. Presented at the annual meetings of the Gerontological Society, San Francisco, October, 1977.

Hartup, W. & Lempers, J. A problem in life-span development: The interactional analysis of family attachments. In P. Baltes & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), Life-span developmental psychology: Personality and socialization. New York: Academic Press, 1973.

Hill, R., Roote, N., Aldous, J., Carlson, R., & MacDonald, R. Family development in three generations. Cambridge: Schenkman, 1970.

Kallish, R. & Knudtson, F. W. Attachment versus disengagement: A life-span conceptualization. Human Development, 1976, 19(3), 171-182.

Lewis, M. & Goldberg, S. Perceptual-cognitive development in infancy: A generalized expectancy model as a function of the mother-infant interaction. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1969, 15(1), 81-100.

Lowenthal, M. & Haven, C. Interaction and adaptation: Intimacy as a critical variable. American Sociological Review, 1968, 33(1), 20-30.

Neugarten, B. L. & Datan, N. Sociological perspectives on the life cycle. In P. B. Baltes and K. W. Schaie (Eds.), Life-span developmental psychology: Personality and socialization. New York: Academic Press, 1973.

Provence, S. & Lipton, R. C. Infants in institutions. New York: International Universities Press, 1962.

Rokeach, M. A. A theory of organization and change within value attitude systems. Journal of Social Issues, 1968, 24, 13-33.

Spitz, R. A. & Wolf, K. M. The smiling response: A contribution to the ontogenesis of social relations. Genetic Psychology Monographs, 1946, 34:57-125.

Troll, L. The family of later life: A decade review. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1971, Vol. 33(2), 263-290.

Troll, L. E. Early and middle adulthood. Monterey, California: Brooks Cole, 1975.

Troll, L., Neugarten, B. & Kraines, R. Similarities in values and other personality characteristics in college students and their parents. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, October, 1969, Vol. 15(4), 323-337.